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ABSTRACT

This paper chronicles the transition and adjustments of a teacher educator and a group of preservice teachers from the application of the case study method in their university classrooms, to their preparation for and participation in a national team case competition, to the impact of this experience on their subsequent personal and professional activities. The prospect of a team case competition offered an unusual opportunity for preservice teachers, who were used to competing exceptionally well individually, to preview an unknown situation together and collaboratively find the best solution(s). As these preservice teachers practiced their problem-solving skills, they also learned to research, network, and collaborate to compete. These experiences resulted in a sense of personal and professional empowerment among team members, inspiring them to establish a similar competition at their home institution and to present their findings through presentations and symposia. An unexpected consequence was the continuing relationship of faculty with individual team members, resulting in a virtual case competition win, and faculty involvement in an innovative teaching initiative across five teacher preparation institutions involving Internet technology and multimedia multicultural cases. (Author/LL)

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Consequences of Preservice Participation in a National Case Competition

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Consequences of Preservice Participation in a National Case Competition

Abstract

This paper chronicles the transition and adjustments a teacher educator and a group of preservice teachers made from the application of the case study method in their university classrooms, to their preparation for participation in a national team case competition, to the impact of this experience on their subsequent personal and professional activities. The prospect of a *team* case competition was particularly intriguing as it offered an unusual opportunity for preservice teachers, who were used to competing exceptionally well individually, to preview an unknown situation together and collaboratively find the best solutions(s). As these preservice teachers practiced their problem-solving skills, they also learned to research, network and collaborate to compete. These experiences resulted in a sense of personal and professional empowerment among team members and inspired them to establish a similar competition at their home institution, and to present their findings through presentations and symposia. An unexpected consequence was the continuing relationship of faculty with individual team members, resulting in a virtual case competition win, and faculty involvement in an innovative teaching initiative across five teacher preparation institutions involving internet technology and multimedia multicultual cases.

Consequences of Preservice Participation in a National Case Competition

One result of the growing interest in case-based pedagogy, application, research and texts has been the establishment of a national team case competition sponsored, in part, by the Association of Teacher Educators, the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, the Commonwealth Center for the Education of Teachers at the University of Virginia, and the National Education Association. The competition, inaugurated in 1992 with the financial support of Allyn & Bacon Publishers, has attracted attention as the first event of its kind in the field of teacher education. The ultimate goal of the competition is to encourage teaching excellence through collaboration, networking, problem-solving, and applications of theory to practice. Four preservice teams are invited annually to the University of Virginia for four days to meet the defending champions and solve a case study of a difficult teaching dilemma.

BACKGROUND

Teams of prospective teachers from across the United States and Canada were encouraged to submit a proposal to Second Commonwealth Center Invitational Team Case Competition in early 1993. The competition, scheduled for four days in early May, was billed as "an event designed to test teachers' abilities to defend their ideas about teaching and learning before an eminent board of judges from various disciplines and a gallery of interested observers" [Ford, 1993]. Teams were encouraged to be diverse in the areas of age, gender, racial composition, ethnic make-up, subject-matter specialties and professionally relevant experiences. They were also asked to communicate the extent to which case based teaching was used at their institution.

During the first day of the competition, the four invited teams (The University of Calgary, The University of Dayton, The University of Hawaii, and The University of Vermont) and the defending champions (Hampton University) traveled to Thomas Jefferson's Monticello, visited with the other participants and met the competition organizers and student assistants. The second day, each team received instructions, was assigned a computer and work space, and given the written case. The case was selected from a text, in press, whose co-authors included several educators from the host

institution [see, Kauffman et. al., 1993]. Teams were allowed six hours to research, diagnose, and prepare a written analysis of no more than five typed pages. The following day, each team received forty-five minutes to orally present their analysis to the judges. This presentation consisted of a ten minute overview from the team captain and the remainder of the time was to be spent responding to questions posed by three provocateurs. The winner was announced that evening at a banquet in the Dome room of the Rotunda. On the next and final morning, a session was held for the purpose of sharing information about each school's teacher education program as well as reflecting and offering feedback regarding the competition experience.

PRELIMINARY PREPARATION

Comprising the Team: Selecting for Personal Qualities and Diversity

The procedure for team selection corresponded to the Commonwealth Center selection criteria in the call for proposals. Discovering that diversity in a homogenous Catholic university was the first challenge, as the majority of preservice teachers tended to be 18-21 years old, white, middle-class, and female. Personal qualities of candidates were also considered in terms of writing, research and presentation skills, problem-solving, leadership, and collaboration abilities. Additionally, candidates were sought who were interested in competing, intrinsically motivated, achievement oriented and diligent. The final team was composed of four females and one male, which included four Caucasians and one African-American. The "developmental design" resulted in selecting one senior who had completed student teaching, two juniors who were enrolled in methods courses and two sophomores who were currently completing their educational psychology requirements. A third sophomore alternate was also selected for a position on the team. Team members were currently enrolled or had completed Dr. Sudzina's case-based *Teaching and Learning* class.

Case-Use Survey

In an effort to provide the proposal with the most complete and accurate information possible, the team wrote and administered a survey within the Department of Teacher Education. The data and responses which were received from various professors in the department affirmed previous notions about the wide-spread use of cases. The finding that cases were being used at every stage in the program did not

surprise them. What did surprise the team were the variety of case resources and implementation in courses. For example, they discovered that some professors were using novels as cases, or writing their own cases or using case texts. They were also using written case analyses and presentations for grading purposes. Students were even writing cases about their field experiences dilemmas in an effort to communicate and problem-solve classroom issues. Additional information about the use of cases across the university was acquired from the Associate Provost for Academic Affairs. This interview revealed that case implementation workshops were provided for professors in all disciplines each academic year. Cases were also a large component of instruction in business, law, psychology, and engineering as well as in education. This information expanded team perspectives about the use of the case study method and reinforced the importance of their participation in the upcoming competition.

Writing the Proposal

Research and data now collected, the team could finally write and construct the actual proposal. This was the first professional writing experience for four out of five of the team members. While each of the team members had produced papers for previous courses, only the team captain had experience writing and researching for publication. Several team members were even intimidated by the prospect at first. The preparation of this document was the team's first cooperative effort, and one that certainly set the stage for future collaboration. Each member of the team took responsibility for a certain part of the proposal's production. The division of labor revealed that the diversity which had been so painstakingly selected, resulted in numerous unexpected benefits. Because individual team members recognized their own strengths, they were able and willing to offer them toward the team's mutual goal. Team members who had a talent for writing compiled the team's biographies and did most of the writing in the document. Those who were proficient at using the computer entered data and generated the graphics and flow charts which made the completed work look professional. Others organized and complied the required number of copies.

The final document surpassed everyone's expectations. It was ten pages, bound, and even included two color photographs. The result of this collaboration was a proposal in which everyone took pride and, subsequently, earned the team an invitation to the competition.

DEVELOPING THE SKILLS TO COMPETE

The prospect of a *team* case competition was particularly intriguing as education professionals are often called to collaborate in the classroom for the benefit of children. The competition offered an unusual opportunity for preservice teachers to get a preview of what their professional positions could eventually entail. There were, however, many skills that needed to be developed for successful collaboration, skills that are often not acquired in an undergraduate teacher preparation program.

Team Building

Team building played an important, if not essential role in the preparation process. Before the team could work together however, there had to be a certain amount of familiarity, camaraderie, and trust developed. The construction of the initial proposal did a great deal to achieve this. But it was still apparent that the team was made up of five students who had achieved on their own but now needed to learn to work together for success. Working dinners were held weekly at the university that combined social and professional knowledge as each member shared their career aspirations, family background and areas of expertise. Team members presented at a symposium together at the university [Sudzina, Ahlgren, Belanich, Damon, Kilbane, Miller, and Young, 1993] and continued to define and refine their roles within the team. They sat in on some classes together using case study analyses and kept each other up to date on what needed to be done. They audiotaped problem solving sessions to learn to listen and acknowledge others' contributions. They brunched together and analyzed videotapes of the previous year's competition. Although this was a difficult process, individuals struggled to put personal differences aside to attain synergy so that the team as a whole would be stronger than any single individual.

Case Analysis and Problem-Solving

While each of the team members had experienced the use of cases before, their experiences were different in many respects. Although several had shared required courses in which cases were used, they found that they each had specific schema with which they thought about cases. Content knowledge as well as personal and professional experiences provided a wealth of information but the team needed to make this information collective. Before the team could develop a strategy for team preparation, it

was important to assess the team's current facility with the method. To discover this, the team took a sample case study, sent by the Commonwealth Center with the call for proposals, and worked to analyze it. (This was the same case which was used in the first competition that took place a year earlier.) Each team member read the case and met together to analyze it as a group. The team leader facilitated the discussion and an audio recording was made of the entire session. From this experience, the team not only developed a knowledge for each other's problem-solving styles, they also acquired important information about where they were and where we had to go. With an audio cassette to review with an unbiased perspective, the team captain and faculty advisor were able to listen for "blind spots" in the team's analysis, identify each team member's problem-solving style and diagnose the team's ability to collaborate. During the next eight weeks, the team's preparation focused on developing teamwork, collaboration and presentation strategies. Additionally, team members meet once a week to discuss cases with an Honors/Scholars section of educational psychology whose focus was case analysis, application, and research.

Research and Content Area Knowledge

In addition to the team's efforts to promote collaboration, critical thinking and a multi-perspective analysis, the team also had to develop a facility for applying content specific knowledge to cases. They also had to learn to back up "gut feelings" with grounding in professional literature. The faculty advisor modeled these strategies and mentored the team as they practiced distinguishing between responses based on generalizations and those based on theoretical applications and research. Adding credibility to opinions and analyses was an important and powerful professional lesson. Through this part of the preparation process, the team engaged in an interesting exercise. They began to review the knowledge which they had obtained through various courses in teacher training and discern which theories would be the most useful in case analysis. This prioritizing and selection was, they realized, a higher order thinking skill. It was quite a discovery when team members realized that they each favored different psychological theories. They also realized that each had "favorite" educational trends and researchers. Team members began to think about their own thinking as well. In addition to a review of previously learned information, they also practiced finding additional information to assist in their problem-solving efforts. Each team member practiced conducting ERIC searches on different educational issues including

multiculturalism, inclusion, journaling, education of the gifted, and urban teaching. This skill was a new acquisition for over half of the team members who had never before been challenged to use computer information indexes, and to apply that information to specific situations.

Strengthening Presentation and Writing Skills

Together, the team began to formulate how the analysis paper could be written. The faculty advisor modeled techniques of professional writing including the use of APA style for documentation, a form that had not been emphasized in the teacher education program. At this point, the team also began to determine a strategy for the oral defense. Through practice, the team began to develop a "feel" for each other's areas of expertise. Team members became comfortable with giving way and conceding to each others responses. They also began to support one another by adding additional information to responses on a case. It became understood that if one member was best at fielding questions regarding, for example, exceptional students, the others would allow them the first response.

The team also produced a poster display about case-based teaching and the competition for a university symposia which celebrated undergraduate research and special projects. Members of the team took turns staffing the presentation and answering questions from faculty, administrators, students, and staff. This provided additional practice in communicating about the competition in a professional setting [see, Sudzina, et. al., 1993].

Mock Simulation - Putting It All Together

In an attempt to prepare as much as possible for the actual competition and to further build team confidence, a mock simulation of the competition was set up. The team met in the library for six hours one Sunday. Using a case selected by the faculty advisor, they discussed, researched and prepared a five-paged typed analysis according to competition guidelines. On Tuesday, they presented their findings to the Honors/Scholars class, who had also read the same case. To further replicate the competition format, the team leader gave a ten minute case overview and the remainder of the time was spent answering questions from the provocateurs (the Honors/Scholars students). This simulation resulted in increased team confidence. It also revealed areas for further improvement.

THE COMPETITION EXPERIENCE

The University of Calgary won the competition. Team advisors, who had seen all the presentations, concurred that the mature graduate Calgary team, (mean age 28), gave a masterful and creative presentation and defense. Although the young UD team, (mean age 20), was disappointed that they did not win, they were overwhelmed by the complimentary and supportive comments that were offered by judges and observers.

The team had looked forward to the competition with certain expectations which were not only met, but surpassed. Team members expected to learn about different teacher education programs, meet other preservice teachers, practice problem-solving and analytical skills, and have fun. They didn't expect the unsolicited affirmation they received regarding their personal and professional abilities from judges and other teacher educators, an experience which broadened their perspectives regarding future professional goals and opportunities.

CONSEQUENCES AND CONCLUSIONS:

After the competition, the team had the chance to reflect on how much they had learned and how far they had come together in order to compete at Virginia. They agreed that this event was one of the highlights of their teacher preparation career. Individual team members expressed an interest in hosting a regional team case competition to offer other preservice teachers a taste of their experiences. Their advisor suggested submitting a panel proposal to national conference to report about these experiences. Both of these activities were realized within the next ten months. Additionally, the faculty advisor co-authored a second publication with one of the team members and wrote an article with another team member about case competition.

Three of the five original students have subsequently won undergraduate research awards and two are listed in Who's Who in American Colleges and Universities. The fifth team member assumed leadership of a preservice team competing in the first virtual case competition conducted on e-mail...and tied for first place with a team from the University of Virginia. Competing schools also included Exeter College, England, the University of Pittsburgh, and the University of Calgary, Canada. Preservice teachers are now requesting to be considered for future case competition experiences.

An unexpected consequence for the faculty advisor was an invitation to participate

(with the University of Minnesota, the University of Pittsburgh, the University of Calgary, and the University of Virginia) in an innovative undergraduate teaching initiative involving internet technology, multimedia cases, and case-based teaching. Preservice teachers at the participating institutions will have the opportunity to discuss the case with each other on the internet and participate in an on-line case competition.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER PREPARATION

Team members collaboratively developed skills of: leadership, cooperation, problem-solving, networking, writing, researching, and oral presentation. The utilization of cases in this fashion inspired these future educators to extend this learning beyond the university classroom, to professional competitions and conferences, and into an elementary classroom. Team members felt enriched and empowered from these experiences. Additionally, they all have assumed leadership roles within the university and community, and several have expressed the desire to continue to write, research, and present collaboratively.

It appears that the competitive aspect of case analysis served to encourage, rather than discourage, a sense of professionalism, comraderie and desire for excellence from these preservice teachers. Additionally, the faculty advisor's mentoring role was extended in unanticipated ways beyond the scope of the classroom through the case competition experience.

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Existing Preconditions

Preservice Teachers:

- **Case-based Teaching**
- **Oral and Written Research Presentations**
- **Collaborative and Cooperative Learning**
- **On-line ERIC Searches**

Teacher Educator

- **Outrageous, Contagious Enthusiasm for Teaching and Innovative Practices**
- **Enjoys Challenges and Competition**
- **Experience Co-Authoring, Co-Presenting with Preservice Teachers**

The Road to Virginia

Part One

- **Deciding to Apply**
- **Comprising the Team**
- **Case-Use Survey**
- **Writing the Proposal**

Part Two

- **Team Building**
- **Case Analysis and Problem-Solving**
- **Research and Content Area Knowledge**
- **Presentations and Writing Skills**
- **Mock Simulation**

Outcomes and Consequences

- Lost / Disappointment
- Sense of Accomplishment
- Observed Peers and Others / Role Models
- Wrote About Experiences
- Panel Presentation
- Organized / Hosted Regonial Case Competition
- Won Virtual Case Competition
- Raised Expectations for What is Possible
- Rewriting Curriculum to Include Internet, Multicultural and Case-based Teaching Experiences and Competition